

# The Korean Teachers and Educational Workers Union: Collective Rights as the Agency of Social Change

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## Changes in teachers' work and the challenges facing teacher unions

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### *The Korean Teachers and Educational Workers Union: Collective Rights as the Agency of Social Change*

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**ABSTRACT:** This article presents a discussion of the development of Jeongyojo or the Korean Teachers and Educational Workers Union from its emergence as a social movement in the late 1980s to its current status and prominent campaigns. The article identifies certain aspects of South Korean history and culture that have shaped the distinctive identity of this teachers union. The article recognizes that, despite legalization some years ago, the Korean Teachers Union continues to engage in controversial campaigns that frequently cause conflicts with the Ministry of Education in South Korea. The article points towards the set of principles of True Education (Chamgyoyook) that provide the guiding framework for the union's activities at home and internationally.

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#### A Tale of Two Days

When it formed on May 28, 1989, The Korean Teachers and Educational Workers Union, or Jeongyojo, had 15,000 illegal members, along with hundreds of thousands of supporters from university students and unionists, and millions of sympathizers amongst the school students, parents and citizens of South Korea. There was also opposition from among sections of those same groups, along with direct repression from the government. At that time there were members of the union imprisoned and under police intimidation and surveillance. The formation of the union was controversial and provoked a crisis in Korean education. The union, however, had formed as a result of already existing crises in Korean education, ranging across issues such as student suicides, financial corruption and extreme militarization in schools (Synott, 2002).

Eighteen years later on May 20, 2007 the Korean Teachers Union (KTU) as it is now known, had over 100,000 legal members, or about 27% of the total teacher workforce in South Korea. Yet, when 5000 supporters met in a rally to celebrate the eighteenth anniversary of the now-legal KTU, again there were members in prison, charged with national security laws and others under suspension and penalty from the Ministry of Education. While much has changed over the past two decades, in some ways things have not changed, including conflicts in the relationship between the KTU and the government. Over these decades the national government has changed four times, but the

dealings between the KTU and the Ministry of Education can be characterized as successive conflicts more so than agreements.

This article will present a brief history and analysis of issues involved in the emergence and subsequent development of Jeongyojo, the KTU. KTU is the most influential and active teachers' union in East Asia and most likely right across Asia. But its real significance lies in its prominent position in South Korea, a nation where education borders on a national obsession that has been at the centre of Korean politics and social concerns for fifty years. This is in a culture that has a tradition of Confucian and Buddhist teaching and learning dating back thousands of years, and which continues to influence contemporary values.

This article will provide insights into cultural and historical contexts that have shaped the Korean Teachers Union and which permeate the relationship between the union and their employers-the Korean government. In the Korean school system there are actually three teacher bodies with equal legal rights and status. There is an association for teachers in the large private-school sector in Korea and this organization has strong associations with the KTU; and there is the Korean Federation of Teachers Associations (KFTA), a school principals' organization, which has been allied to government positions and is a conservative competitor and rival to the KTU. However, the KTU is the body that has campaigned for and won two of the three basic labor conditions in Korea-freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining, but not the right to strike. The KTU is affiliated with the Korean Federation of Trade Unions and is a member of the International Labour Organisation and Education International.

### **The Anniversary Celebration**

A gathering of KTU is always a colorful affair, with flags and banners carrying the logo of the union. There are music and renditions of the union songs that gained popularity during the years of struggle for legalization. The eighteenth anniversary of the founding of the KTU was held on May 20, 2007 in the South Korean city of Namju where members commemorated the history of the organization, while presenting a focus on current major campaigns.

One campaign highlighted at the gathering was that concerned with the impacts on Korean rural education of the current Free Trade Agreement negotiations between Korean and U.S. governments. The issue embraces two longstanding frames of the teachers' union movement. Firstly, are the connections to the tradition of the rural people's movement in Korea. The campaign to defend rural education connects the KTU to the distinctly Korean phenomenon of 'minjung' or 'peoples' culture that has its roots in the culture, suffering, and rebellions of rural peasantry and was subsequently transformed into the industrial proletariat movement of the modernization period (Wells, 1995). This connection was forged in the early days of the teachers' union movement, when members would set up night schools in industrial areas and provide young factory workers with the opportunity for some education. In its own tradition of resistance to oppression, the KTU has forged a distinctive counter-hegemonic sub-culture that identified in style and substance with the 'minjung' consciousness.

The anti-imperial frame relates to the goal of Korean teachers to establish a national education free of the legacies of the Japanese colonial system that enslaved the nation from 1910(1945 and, also, the U.S.-influenced military-styled education that dominated Korean schools through the Cold War and after. It promotes a goal to rid Korean education of the pernicious influence of foreign powers. Thus the Free Trade Agreement campaign is a new issue, but also represents a consistent position of the KTU on important principles.

At the anniversary meeting a letter was read out, written by Fred van Leeuwen, General Secretary of Education International, the umbrella body of teacher unions worldwide (Education International, 2007). EI along with the International Labour Organisation, had been one of the prominent international bodies that exerted pressure on the government of Korea to legalize the KTU. This letter noted that from 169 countries and territories there were 30 million teachers<sup>1</sup> from 384 member organizations associated with EI. In his letter, Leeuwen recognized the leadership role of the KTU in the struggle for educational democracy in Korea and its significance as a world model of teacher unions struggling for industrial and human rights.

It was a day for celebrating the past and looking forward to the future as a legitimate institution in Korean education. KTU president Jung Jin Hwa, who was elected in December 2006, campaigned on a slogan of 'Building the Union

'Closer to the People,' signaling a further departure from the confrontational tactics of the past towards a role as facilitator and negotiator of educational issues. In her inaugural speech, Jung Jin Hwa advocated that there would be "considerable change in union policies," and a shift from "hard-line protests" to "convincing" authorities and engaging in "conversations with parents and students."

Such conciliation had not been the tone of the occasion when the union was founded in 1989. According to national industrial laws it was illegal for public servants in Korea to form and be members of unions. In 1989 an atmosphere of crisis had built up over two weeks since the plan was announced at a rally on May 15, traditionally Teachers Day in Korea. The government had threatened mass sackings if teachers went ahead with the plan to form a union and, during the lead up weeks, engaged in a series of repressive actions, such as raiding bookstores of 'subversive' teachers literature, running ads in newspapers condemning the teachers, and trying to associate the union movement with North-Korean inspired revolutionaries out to overthrow the state.

Moreover, teachers, especially, were bound to roles as servants of the society in a tradition with deep Confucianist roots. This role had been greatly manipulated by oppressive governments right through the twentieth century-initially Japanese colonial, and then nationalist military governments. Since the 1960s this cultural value had been re-converted into values of national service as Korea pursued its NIC model of industrial development. Unions were presumed to be organizations for the militant industrial proletariat that were the low-cost human capital at the source of the booming Korean economy. Teachers had a role to provide literate and obedient-but not critical-workers to the exploitative factories. They themselves were expected to be models of patriotism, frugality, and hard work.

The day set for the inauguration ceremony, May 28, 1989, brought thousands of riot police into eastern Seoul's Hanyang University, the site set for the rally. Originally sanctioned by the police, the rally was now declared illegal, so that anyone attending could be arrested. Teams of heavily armed, helmeted riot police staked out strategic points to survey the flow of people, intimidate passers-by and prevent anyone from entering the rally site.

In the final hours before the meeting, the organizers changed the site of the rally, switching across the city to Yonsei University. Getting to the site more quickly than the 4,500 riot police who swarmed after them, a few hundred teachers, surrounded by a protective cordon of university students, held a ceremony inaugurating the Korean Teachers' and Educational Workers' Union. Elected President, 54-year-old Young-Gyu Yun, the physical education teacher who had abandoned his settled life to become an activist and inspirational leader, demanded the government cease repression of the union movement and committed the union to struggle for democratic education. Along with a group of union leaders, he then took shelter at the headquarters of a major opposition political party, the Reunification Democratic Party, and led twenty-six leaders of the movement in a hunger strike to protest the repression of the new union. The party leader who offered asylum was Kim Young Sam, destined to become the next President of South Korea. The well-publicized hunger strike lasted for nine days and kept the attention of the nation focused on the deteriorating physical condition of Young-Gyu Yun and his colleagues ("No early solution," 1989).

While the hunger strikers kept their vigil, local branches of KTU were initiated around South Korea. Over one hundred school chapters formed within a fortnight after inauguration. Then, Young-Gyu Yun and the other hunger strikers announced that they were ending their fast and intended to return to their schools. The hunger strikers were in poor health, with about one dozen of them severely exhausted. Leaving the offices of the Reunification Democratic Party on Monday, June 5, they were accompanied by three politicians from opposition parties. The group travelled by bus to Yongdong Severance Hospital for treatment. Police were waiting with arrest warrants and as soon as Young-Gyu Yun and four other leaders had recovered somewhat, the police took them into custody ("DJ asks teachers," 1998).

The president was to spend the next year in jail. During that period the controversy and campaign continued. There were frequent demonstrations by teachers, university students, school students, supportive parents. There were more hunger strikes and arrests, there were mass sackings, followed by an 'attendance campaign' when sacked teachers turned up at their classes. There were well-publicized tragedies as students took their own lives in protest at the treatment of their teachers, or sacked teachers who died in miserable circumstances-such as one in his car where he had been forced to live, and another by carbon monoxide poisoning from leaking heat pipes in the basement where she had been forced to live. The national media and civil society were obsessed with the crisis that had been produced by the formation of the union-but also pointed towards the long-running grievances and conditions in the

school system that had caused the teachers to resort to radical actions. For their part the sacked teachers set up such operations as educational coaching schools, a products company, newspaper, and publishing activities. They were financially sustained by small incomes derived from these activities and by voluntary contributions by teachers employed in the school system. They waged a relentless and at times provocative campaign for legalization and the recognition of their grievances.

### The Grievances of the Teachers Reform Movement

The grievances of Korean teachers that motivated them to campaign so resolutely for a legal teachers union were a range of issues and conditions that had developed in the Korean school system since its inception. In fact the age-old system of village-level hakwon and Confucianist style academies had not been transformed into a national education system before the Japanese colonial government (1910(1945) established a national school system as an effective means of colonial control over the population-exerting both a surveillance function and a propaganda function. So, prior to the colonial use of schooling as a means of social control, Korea had not formed a coherent state-administered educational system along the style of western nations. The following section briefly identifies and discusses the central grievances of the teachers that formed the KTU. They represent key elements of the school system as experienced by teachers:

\* A mixture of oppressive roles which teachers were expected to perform, eg: teachers as clergy, teachers as agents of colonial policing, teachers as anti-communists; teachers as producers of human capital; teachers as agents of authoritarian government's propaganda; teachers as fund-raisers for schools.

\* A range of violating school values and practices: such as 'examination hell' being the university entrance exam facing students at the end of their schooling; strict centralized control of knowledge and curricula; the use of classrooms as sites for political propaganda; actual and symbolic violence in schools; financial corruption and exploitation; poor educational environment; oppressive working conditions for teachers and other education workers; coercive ideologies and legislation.

\* Oppressive social effects of schooling:

E.g. the burden of education on Korean families and children; the financial drain to the community of extreme outside-hours private education; the excessive competition in schooling; student suicides; the emphasis in schools on producing human capital for the national economic drive; the militarism of schools.

These general categories of teachers experience emerged from the particular areas of the educational system which teachers set out to reform:

#### *Identity grievances.*

There were a range of complex issues regarding teachers' status and roles that teachers in the union movement worked to transform. The identity of teachers in Korea extends back into ancient history of early Buddhist kingdoms, then was shaped through six centuries of strongly Confucianist government and values. Teachers became one of the so-called Three Pillars of society upholding and modeling exemplary Confucianist behavior (Lee, 1958; Kim, 1985). This concept became distorted when, under the Japanese tyranny, teachers were held responsible for implementing such plans as the General Plan of the Chosun Educational Ordinance of 1911 which stated "the essential principle of education in Chosun shall be the making of good and loyal subjects" (Bureau of Education, 1912, Chap. I, Art. II). Teachers had to sign an oath of devotion to the will of the Japanese Emperor, and abide by the nine rules for teachers set out in the colonial Manual of Education (Bureau of Education, 1912). These rules included spying on anti-government sentiments not only in their schools but in their communities, and the duty of organizing child labor for the colonial regime.

After 1960, teachers were incorporated into the industrial development program and teachers were required to engage in the patriotic duty of national development. President Park Chung Hee (1960(1979) regarded the time as "an historical moment that promises glory" (1979, p.14) for which endless sacrifices had to be made. Park proclaimed his National Charter of Education in December, 1978 and it obliged teachers to identify with the historical roles of teachers as servants of the national interest. In effect teachers became mouthpieces and propagandists of nationalist, anti-communist, and human capital development information and ideology. In the Declaration of

Formation of Jeongyojo in May, 1990 the teachers declared:

Because of the distorted education enforced by dictatorial regimes, we have lost our role as teachers and have become sellers of fragmentary knowledge and technicians in preparing pupils for examinations. Who will call us teachers? (Jeongyojo, 1990a, p. 5).

Thus the issue of identity was a central issue in the formation of the teachers union and through their collective voices and actions the teachers acted to redefine their identity as educational reformers and leaders of democratic social change in Korea.

*The use of education in the national development drive.*

In the decades leading into the Pacific war, the colony of Korea was converted from an agricultural society to the military industrial base for Japan, "so rapidly in pace and so massively in scope that little parallel exists in any other colony" (Kwon, 1991, p. 7). The years following the war and Liberation from Japan's colonial rule were turbulent ones, in which Korea was a nation largely aid-dependent on the U.S. and dominated by the new American conflict of the Cold War. The Korean War (1950(53) was a tragedy that destroyed millions of lives and left the nation impoverished, divided, and with its infrastructure destroyed. Schools were conducted outdoors or in very rough conditions. Gradually this infrastructure was rebuilt, using aid funds. The seizure of power by Park Chung Hee in May, 1961 abruptly set new directions for the society. It was to become an industrially-based export economy, with skilled and low-cost labor as a comparative advantage in the modernization drive. The economic miracle of South Korea became paradigmatic for the Newly Industrialised Country economic model, such that the World Bank could report in 1983, "The Koreans have shown, above all, that with a strong political commitment to international competitiveness and with effective institutions, an able bureaucracy, disciplined workers and the right incentives-it is possible to have world trade lead a country's economic growth and development" (World Bank, 1984, p. 75).

To achieve this growth schools and teachers were mobilized into an industrialized model of education, with poor conditions, large classes, centralized curriculum and a fierce competition for the relatively small number of university places that offered a chance to escape becoming exploited industrial workers.

The teachers union movement decried this system where they were used as "simple salesmen who sell the knowledge" that was to be tested in the examinations. They declared that "we have been manacled in the name of pseudo-education-ranking students and just allocating grades within the guides of our esteemed profession" (Jeongyojo, 1990b, p. 1). The grievance against the exploitation of teachers as agents of the human capital model was, thus, another key issue of the unionized teachers.

*Industrial relations for Teachers.*

Two central and related circumstances in industrial relations determined the situation of teachers during the rapid economic development of South Korea, which now has been sustained for almost fifty years apart from the three-year setback of the Asian Economic crisis from 1997. These conditions were, firstly, the impacts on teachers of labor conditions in the development society-such that schools paralleled the conditions in industrial worksites, with low wages, long work hours, difficult conditions, and repressive managers (principals). Schools produced in students the behaviors and attitudes that would make them suitable workers-often through actual and institutional violence-and, the examination system drove the whole process along.

The second aspect of industrial relations was that of the legal contexts of school teachers. Laws such as The Labour Union Law, the National Public Servants Act and the National Security Law served to ensure that teachers could not form collective industrial groups or speak out about their circumstances. The National Security Law, which was the main anti-communist law in Korea since 1948 sanctioned the denial of human rights, free speech, and association in the guise of national security and was often used against labor leaders across many industrial sectors, as well as dissenting students, church ministers, and civic leaders.

The teachers union entered into a series of legal battles to gain labor and political rights for teachers.

### *Militarism and national reunification education in schools.*

The final instance here of grievances that inspired the teachers to form a union was the ongoing manipulation of the education system to push a militaristic set of values in respect to the division and conflict between South and North Korea. This was a complex issue and there were many aspects to it, but teachers were expected to teach uncritically views that demonized North Korea and implemented a U.S.-driven agenda for Cold War education policy. This in fact was an international foreign policy of the U.S. but had particular salience and mode of implementation in South Korea, which, like West Germany was a front line of the Cold War.

In South Korea students were required to participate in the Student Defence Corps. Also text books like Kyo-Ryun meaning 'Military Education,' that portrayed North Korea as an implacable enemy, were obliged to be taught in schools. During the 1980s there were purification campaigns in schools to look for students with dissident views. Students were required to do assignments, posters, and chant slogans denouncing communism. The thrust of the education was towards denouncing North Korea and asserting the superiority of South Korea. Reformist teachers saw such approaches as maintaining the ideological division, legitimating authoritarian power structures, and the ongoing violation of human rights in South Korea. Under the system in place any notion of national reunification was impossible. The KTU developed a vigorous campaign for a constructive, dialogic humane model of reunification education. They advocated an education that was independent of the influence of foreign powers; that made available facts about the two Koreas so students could understand the differences; and that abandoned the approach of demonizing North Korea and promoting hostility, but accepted the right of the people of North Korea to exist and a constructive approach to engagement with the North.

In the above discussion I have summarized some of the key features in the South Korean School system that were central grievances and targets for reform by the teachers' union movement in South Korea. These were not all the issues, but they indicate the range of concerns of Korean teachers and indicate how the issues were locked into the whole system of social policy and management in South Korean education and the political/economic/military systems of the nation. Teachers were among leaders who publicly identified the nature of this system and advocated that educational change was intrinsic with broader social and political change. On such a platform-and in the vanguard of the broad civil society movement for democracy in Korea-the teachers' union movement was severely repressed by the government.

### **The Path to Legalization**

After a long campaign-and with strong support from parents groups such as 'Parents for true education' and international agencies such as Education International, Human Rights Watch, and the International Labour Organisation, the Korean Teachers Union was legally recognized as a trade union in July, 1999. The national situation produced a context for the official policies against the KTU to change. When South Korea applied for entrance to the OECD in 1995, one of the items recommended to the Korean government by the OECD Education Review team was that of recognizing KTU and ending the illegality of the teachers' union. More years passed without this being implemented, until the Asian Economic Crisis brought a near collapse of the South Korean economy in late 1997. One condition of a package of bail-out loans by the International Monetary Fund was for restructuring and large-scale labor reforms. Recently elected President Kim Dae Jung, who had strong democratic credentials and history, agreed in negotiations with the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions, that the government would meet certain conditions in order to get the cooperation of unions in the economic reforms. One of these, as reported in The Korea Herald, was "for public officials and teachers to be allowed to form trade unions and guarantee of the rights of workers to engage in political activities" ("DJ asks teachers," 1998, p. 10). There was also considerable support across the growing middle-classes that had embraced the growth of democracy in South Korea. These contextual factors, along with president Kim's desire to continue the process of embedding democratic practices in Korean institutions and governance, as well as his 'Sunshine Policy' towards North Korea opened the way for the formal recognition of the Korean Teachers Union.

## The Consolidation of True Education Philosophy

Since its legalization the KTU has expanded its membership and organizational structure and, as indicated in the earlier section of this article, has acted to soften the public perception of its members as radicals. It has been a very active participant in areas of reform in curricula, text-books, school administration and financing, as well as those industrial issues of teachers' salaries and conditions. Nevertheless, frequent new issues in education have emerged that require the KTU to respond vigorously, and often against the Ministry of Education and the government. In the next section of the article I will briefly review some of these issues.

The KTU response to these issues is determined within the frame of the principles of True Education (Chamgyoyook), being the educational philosophy that formed the basis of the teachers union movement from its earliest years. There were three central frames of True Education: Education that is Democratic (i.e. allows for active learning by students and participation in areas like curriculum and school policies by teachers); education that is Humane (i.e. where the structural violence of the human capital/political authoritarianism mode is abandoned in place of human rights); and education that is Nationalistic (meaning free of foreign-specifically U.S.-intervention). The KTU National Congress in February, 2002, approved an up-dated set of principles of True Education, which have fourteen key platforms. These need to be articulated here for they demonstrate clearly the basis for all activities of the KTU:

- \* We educate the whole person, one who respects life
- \* We pursue the establishment of an independent nation and the reunified Korea
- \* We educate for a democracy
- \* We protect student's mental and physical health
- \* We teach gender equality
- \* We promote human rights
- \* We respect the value and labour and the rights of labourers
- \* We teach coexistence with nature
- \* We implement the school curriculum creatively
- \* We focus on helping and cooperating with others
- \* We respect and develop student autonomy
- \* We are researching and practising with colleagues
- \* We are working with parents and communities
- \* We confront the absurdities of our education system (Korean Teachers and Educational workers Union, 2002).

## Recent Issues for the KTU

These principles continue to inform the approach taken by the KTU to many different issues. They have brought these approaches into dialogues with the government over a wide range of educational issues and there have been constructive outcomes in some areas, such as curriculum reform, pedagogical practice reforms, and school-community relations reforms. But there have been also major educational issues in recent times where the Korean Teachers Union has taken an activist stance resulting in conflicts with the Ministry of Education and the government. In the final section of this article I will identify a few of these instances as illustrations of the distinctive role the KTU plays in Korean society as it continues to promote its discourse of True Education.

### NEIS

One of the most vigorous campaigns of the KTU in recent times has been that involving the government's plan to introduce the Electronic Educational Administration or new Educational Information system (NEIS). The NEIS which is basically a comprehensive national data system was introduced as part of an e-government project to connect schools across the nation to an office of education through the Internet and deal with educational affairs electronically. The Ministry of Education and Human Resources Development considered "electronic government a necessity" (Ministry of Education and Human Resource development, Republic of Korea, 2001, p.2) as Korea positions itself as a knowledge nation in the technology-based global environment. The policy has been to establish a high-tech schooling supported by a national, efficient and streamlined educational administration system.

The teachers union challenged the policy of widely available records on students and teachers. The availability of information that can be considered confidential, whether it is an individual student's health record, or information on a

teacher's political activities (e.g. being a union delegate) was challenged as a human rights violation by the KTU who took the case to the National Human Rights Commission. In May, 2003, the National Human Rights Commission declared that there were human rights concerns over the NEIS and advised the education ministry to return to schools three items of student information-academic performance grades, health records, and admissions records-from the NEIS to the old Client Server (CS) system, which was largely school-based. The NHRC declared that all personnel records should be excluded from the NEIS and that strict security measures should be established over the data, such as who has access to it and to what uses it can be put. Despite its earlier indication to abide by the decision, the Ministry declared its intention to implement the system irrespective of opposition.

Initially there was some compromise but the Ministry agreed to withdraw only one of the three contentious items of information, that of health records. The union reacted to this by declaring a strike and public rally. Numbers of KTU leaders began a hunger strike while there was call for a general stoppage. The government indicated a school walk-out was illegal and it would try and prevent such industrial actions. This provoked protests from KTU over the broader issues of teachers' rights for collective assembly.

The opposition of the union was supported by a majority of teachers, indicated by a survey by Hangil Research who reported that 72.7% of teachers had concerns over the human rights aspects of the NEIS (Chosun Ilbo, 2003). Officials of the Human Rights Commission publicly stated that the government should accept the Commissions findings. In the face of such opposition, the Ministry of Education back-flipped and announced that it was dropping the three contested areas of information and reviewing the whole process of implementation.

### **Peace Education**

In January of this year two prominent KTU members-teachers at middle schools-were charged by police and held in isolation under national security laws for activities allegedly supporting North Korea. Both of these teachers had been working closely with the government on reunification education matters. One of them had been awarded a prize by the government for his work, while the other, supported by the Ministry of Education had collaborated with a teacher from North Korea in developing lesson plans for reunification education. Yet now they have been charged as a result of concerns raised that they may be brainwashing children with pro-North Korean rhetoric. Obviously the KTU has been vigorously supporting these teachers in what remains a contentious area of education where the KTU exerts a strong position. Both of the arrested teachers have at different times been the chair of KTUs Reunification Education Committee.

The general anti-war position expressed in true education theory and maintained in the reunification education issue took on another dimension when the KTU supported members teaching classes opposing the Korean government's decision to send troops to Iraq in 2004. The KTU posted materials supporting this position on their Web site. The anti-war classes were conducted intensively after a Korean translator was killed in Iraq. The government warned the union against teaching classes that opposed government policy and ideology, and insisted in a balanced treatment that respected the government policy on Iraq. The KTU replied,

"The purpose of anti-war classes is to teach the importance of peace and life. For now we do not intend to change the materials, but we will consider adding some new materials" (Moses, 2007, p. 3).

In another instance of the KTU becoming involved in political issues that are contextual rather than central to education, in 2004 three KTU leaders were arrested for making public statements in opposition to the impeachment process instigated in the National Assembly against President Roh Moo Hyun. The teachers were arrested for violating the laws that ban public servants from engaging in politics.

In both the Iraq case and the impeachment issue the KTU was insisting on the rights of teachers to collectively engage in the process of social democracy and participation.

### **Education for People with a Disability**

One area of education where the KTU has campaigned in recent times has been in respect to education for disabled

people-for whom there is very little support and welfare in South Korea. The KTU has raised public awareness to the fact that over 50% of disabled people have not received education beyond primary school levels and that most disabled people spend their days at home due to no suitable schools, transport or teachers being available. The KTU has been campaigning for the government to address this clear injustice and human rights violation.

### **The Proposed Teacher Evaluation System**

During 2007 a central industrial issue developed in Korean education around the government's intention to introduce new industrial measures including a centralized teachers' evaluation system and a new pension system for teachers. The KTU asserted that they were not consulted regarding these measures. The issue developed as a crisis when 430 teachers were arrested by police and financially penalized for participating in an assembly protesting the new system. This collective punishment, the first since the foundation of the KTU in 1989, was announced even though the teachers had applied in advance for holiday leave on the day of the protest, and, when it was refused by school principals, rescheduled their classes so that they could attend the assembly.

The KTU, backed by a letter from Education International on February 21, 2007, to the President of South Korea defended their members' rights to participate in legal union activities, and condemned the way in which the teachers were intimidated by police, and subsequently denied any rights of defense by the disciplinary committees that were established.

The teacher evaluation itself was criticized by the KTU as "a cynical ploy on the part of the Ministry of Education to scapegoat teachers for education policies that continue to fail both students and teachers" (Hwang, 2007).

These range of current and recent instances, including those mentioned at the outset of this article, such as the issue over the Free Trade Agreement between the U.S. and Korea, give some indication of the range of activities of the Korean Teachers Union. As well as constantly negotiating with government over such industrial matters as class sizes and teaching hours, the KTU has a broader vision and agenda for education in Korea which has been consistent with the conceptions of teacher identity as relevant social and political actors that has been a central mobilizing force for the KTU since its emergence from the social movement for educational reform.

### **Conclusion**

In this article I have set out to introduce and discuss some of the history and defining characteristics of Jeongyojo, The Korean Teachers and Educational Workers Union (KTU). It can be seen that this particular union has a very distinctive local history which, nevertheless, intersects with many regional and broader international issues. The history of the formation of the union was undoubtedly one of struggle against a wide range of opposing forces and the legalization of the union after the concerted struggle was a watershed in the democratic development of education in South Korea and the professional status of teachers. The continual willingness of the KTU to engage in controversial issues in keeping with their vision of True Education for Korean schools-and ultimately a truly national school system in a reunited Korea-stands as an example in the region and to teacher unions worldwide that the work of teacher unions is important in the development of national values as they work to protect the rights of their members and the students in the national school system.

### **Endnote**

1 Out of a total world school teaching population of about 20 million people.

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